

SOME *Police V^o 10.*

H I N T S *K*

IN REGARD TO THE
BETTER MANAGEMENT

OF THE

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L O N D O N:

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M.DCC.LXXXIV.



H I N T S, &c.

MY LORD,

AMONG the several grievances we complain of in this our distressed nation, which are certainly not a few, there is not one, perhaps, of a more alarming nature, or that calls more loudly for redress, than the oppressive burden we labour under in maintaining our poor.

THE yearly sum raised for that purpose is enormous; and yet the

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poor in this kingdom are, in general, so dissatisfied, as to shew an inclination to leave their native country, whenever the least alluring bait is hung out to seduce them. The houses of industry, erected in some places, have certainly done service ; but considerable objections have been made to them, and it is much to be feared, that whenever gentlemen of character, in the neighbourhood, shall cease to inspect them, they will become great nuisances.

It is much to be wished, my Lord, that a spirit of industry, and a desire of living with some degree of credit, could be excited among
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the poor in the respective parishes of this kingdom. This would go further towards redressing this great evil, than most of those large and extensive plans of management and reformation, that have hitherto been proposed. It is observable, that the poor are not sufficiently dependent upon the principal inhabitants of the places where they dwell, to think it worth while to merit their favour by a good conduct. One general idea prevails among them, viz, that a large sum of money lies in the hands of the parish-officers, sufficient to answer all their wants, and, therefore, why should they be backward, upon

occasion, in applying for their share of it? Upon the strength of this persuasion, a man of a very profligate life, who spends all he can come at in drink, has recourse to his officer, without scruple, and demands relief; and, if expostulated with, or reproved for his irregularities, will immediately summon him before a magistrate, knowing, that if he does not succeed, he suffers no other inconvenience but the loss of his labour. It is amazing what needless trouble is hence created to parish-officers in general; might it not be expedient, whenever the person applying is found to deserve no relief, for

for the magistrate to fix some punishment upon him for his impertinence, and, by this means, prevent the great number of frivolous applications? But this I submit to superior wisdom,

It is, secondly, to be wished, that greater encouragement should always be given, both in the distribution of our private favours, and the allotment of our public collections, to the industrious and sober, when they fall into misfortunes, and sue for relief, than to the remarkably idle and vicious; but this, for the most part, is not the case, at least when application is made to the public officers of the
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parish ; for they, having been roughly treated by the insolence of many of the poor, set their faces too much against them all, without making proper distinctions ; by which means, the timid and the modest, who are generally the most deserving, soon drop their pretensions, and retire in silence ; whilst the bold and intrepid persist, and are successful. This does great prejudice.

BUT the greatest excitement to industry and good behaviour among the poor, would be, the putting into execution a scheme that has lately been much spoken of, viz. allotting, to their benefit some of those

those waste-lands, with which this country in so many places abounds. If a portion of four or five acres of such land were to be given to those families in a parish, which the major part of the inhabitants should think most deserving, it would certainly induce all, in general, to be more careful of their conduct. I would propose, that the ground should be first cleared out and fenced, and put into some tolerable order, at the expence of the parish, each of the farmers contributing a few days of labour to that purpose, after which the occupier should pay one shilling an acre yearly to the common stock. If the land were con-

contiguous to the place of habitation (which would be to be wished, and might, in time, perhaps, be the general case, as the present cottages should fall into decay,) then let a small part of it be laid out in an orchard and garden, and the rest in grass ground, which should never be broken up, but by consent of the parishioners, as it would be best that the man should continue at his day-labour, and the produce of the little farm be left to the management of the wife. In some parishes, the quantity of waste-land is but small; in others, very large; perhaps a portion might be taken from one, for the accommodation of several that are contiguous;

guous; but this must be left to the discretion of the commissioners.

WHENEVER the occupier of these few acres dies, the premises should be considered as reverting to the parish, and a new choice be made of a tenant. Circumstances must determine whether the widow should be continued, or whether any other family more distressed should be placed in her room.

It is much to be lamented, that gentlemen of large property will so easily be induced to lay several farms together, and put them into the hands of one te-

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nant. Great inconveniences arise from hence to the public; the farm houses, all except that in which the occupier dwells, will in course become habitations for cottagers, and be distributed into as many tenements as the size of the houses will admit; every inch of ground will be taken from them up to the very walls, and nothing left for the poor cottagers but a pathway to the door of their habitation, with a strict prohibition (which is needless and ridiculous) to keep neither pig nor fowl. If two or three families, with their children, are thus cooped up in these narrow apartments; and the father, upon whose labour they all depend for
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their daily subsistence, should be confined with sickness, only for a single week ; I would ask, what possible resource can they have against starving, but by application to the parish ? Whereas, if three or four acres of land were allotted to each tenement, with as little inconvenience as possible to the farm, and fixed at a moderate rent by the owner himself, payable into the hands of his tenant, the poor cottagers, as well as the whole parish, would be gainers thereby, and the rent but little diminished, if at all, to the owner of the farm.

I AM not insensible what indignation the enraged tenant will at once express at such a proposal ; he will peremptorily declare, that he will hire the farm upon no such conditions ; and, if he is resolute, will probably gain his point, for these large undertakers are men rising up into too great consequence easily to submit to opposition. But I mention my scheme with the greater confidence, because I have the sanction of your Lordship's example in your own parish, where, by annexing a few acres of land to several of your cottages, you have the satisfaction of seeing many poor families live with great comfort, and the farmers themselves not discontented ;

contented : but I ought to observe, that your farms continue of a moderate size.

IN almost every parish, there should be an house of reception for the aged and the orphans, with five or six acres of land annexed, sufficient to keep two or three cows, and three or four pigs, and a garden planted with useful vegetables. This would enable the keeper of the said house to support those that should be sent to him, at a much lower price than what is now usually paid, and be a great saving to the whole parish.

A DESIGN has frequently been mentioned, of inclosing some waste-lands

lands in different parts of the kingdom, for the purpose of planting timber for the use of the Royal Navy; it is to be wished, that the underwoods, at the same time, should be carefully preserved, in order to be cut down at the proper season, and given to the poor in the neighbouring parishes, at the discretion of the principal inhabitants; those, among the poor, who had been convicted of breaking hedges and stealing wood, being always to be excluded.

THERE is frequently great room for complaint in the misapplication of the money collected for the maintenance of the poor; not by
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embezzlements, or profuse expences at parish-meetings, such instances rarely happen in those places to which my present observations are chiefly confined ; but by the inexperience or unfitness of those to whom the office of overseer of the poor is frequently committed. There may not be five persons in the whole village properly qualified for the execution of this trust, and yet the greatest part of the inhabitants, with very few exceptions, will readily accept this office in their turns ; some, to give them an opportunity of making use of the money deposited in their hands ; others, to assist some friend in trade, in the manner of
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laying it out; others again, for the pleasure of exercising a brief authority, and seeing themselves attended by the suppliant poor; and all of them for reasons quite foreign to the good of the parish. Would it not, therefore, tend more to the public benefit, if some person, of known integrity and judgment, could be prevailed upon, for a small yearly gratuity, to accept the office of overseer? It would be in the power of such a man, by prudent management, to prevent many heavy expences from falling upon the parish. He would know how to proceed in most emergencies, without committing mistakes; he would suffer no

no strangers to continue without bringing legal certificates ; he would compel parents, when their children should arrive at a proper age, to place them out in services (the neglect of which, is the source of infinite mischief) ; he would be so perfectly acquainted with the habits and circumstances of the poor, as to be able to point out the most effectual methods of relieving them. In short, such a one would be a vigilant guardian in every thing that concerned the welfare of the parish. But, to prevent him from exercising any undue authority, he should be enjoined to undertake no material business without the consent of the vestry, and not be permitted

mitted to secrete any part of his accounts from those who are desirous of examining them ; all should lie open for general inspection. He must be supported in the execution of his office by the principal inhabitants ; or, otherwise, the opposition he would meet with from the rudeness of some of the lower people, or perhaps from two or three opinionated farmers, whom nothing might content but what was done by themselves, would create an uneasiness that could not be borne. Upon the whole, I am so thoroughly persuaded of the utility of such an officer, properly countenanced by the parish, but still under due restraint, that I am

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convinced it would soon appear to the satisfaction of all those that should make the trial.

It is a matter of some difficulty to find out the properest method of assisting the poor when they are visited with sickness; if the neighbouring apothecary has unlimited orders to administer medicines to them, as often as they think proper to apply, it would create an expence that the parish would not be able to support; if an agreement is made with him to attend all the sick poor in general that are recommended by the overseer, at a certain fixed sum, which is usually the case, and that upon the

lowest terms he can be prevailed upon to accept, then there is almost a moral certainty that they will be frequently neglected. I know of no method to prevent it, but for the overseer kindly to exert his authority, in seeing that those to whom he gives an order shall not be slighted.

SOCIETIES called *Box-Clubs*, should be greatly encouraged; they were instituted by the poor themselves, and have saved great expences to many parishes, when the subscribers have been confined by a tedious sickness.

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GREAT care should be constantly taken, to place out the youths of both sexes at proper services, as soon as their ages will permit.

THE neglect of this, as I intimated just now, is productive of infinite mischief; habits of idleness are contracted at home, which rendering them unfit for servile labour, they soon become necessitous; and, if they marry, never fail, within a very short space of time, to sue to the parish for relief: whereas, if they continue for some years in service, they are able to provide themselves the common necessaries of furniture before they marry; and both having been habituated

bituated to industry, seldom fail to live comfortably, and provide decently for their families.

BUT to introduce these, or any other useful regulations in a parish, it is necessary there should be a mutual good agreement among the inhabitants, which (with concern it must be spoken) is frequently wanting in many villages ; animosities and dissensions preventing all efforts towards promoting the general good. Indeed this harmony can never be so well kept up, as when the gentleman, who is possessed of the property of the parish, thinks it matter of conscientious duty to reside as much as possible
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amongst his tenants, and to use his authority in promoting their general benefit.

AND here I must again take leave to bring your Lordship's own parish into a precedent, where, by the influence you have over your tenants, an influence founded upon esteem and regard, as well as awe, a general good agreement seems to prevail, and all things are conducted with unanimity : they readily concur in whatever is proposed for the benefit of the whole, as well knowing this is the only method of securing your Lordship's favour.

THE advantage of such a mutual harmony, appears from the unhappy

happy contrast in a neighbouring parish ; where the great man, who is the proprietor, divesting himself of all regard for the welfare of his tenants, never interferes in their public business ; for which reason it comes to pass, that each endeavouring to take the rule, their vestry-meetings are all clamour and confusion ; constant mistakes are made, whereby needless expences are incurred, and the poor are, in general, neglected and miserable ; and although the village does not exceed that of your Lordship's, either in limits or number of inhabitants, the levies are said to be double. No greater misfortune can happen to a community, than
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for each man to be permitted to follow his own wayward inclinations. A restraint should be laid upon the perverse passions of men, both for their own sakes, and the benefit of those that dwell near them. Nor is such a restraint incompatible with the idea of liberty; for liberty, subject to no controul, is licentiousness, producing anarchy and confusion, and frequently ending in downright despotism. And, although we might not venture to recommend such an exertion of power in the government of the nation at large, yet surely no dangerous consequences are to be apprehended, when it is made use of in private parishes; so far from it,

nothing appears more evident, that, unless gentlemen of property and rank will take to themselves some share of trouble in their several districts, we must be an undone people ; for it is not only the misconduct of parochial affairs, occasioned by the perverse humours of those that compose vestries, that wants to be rectified ; but the wretchedness of the poor, and consequently the enormous burden of maintaining them, are daily augmented by the increasing profligacy of their lives ; degeneracy of manners has found its way even into our most retired villages. Formerly the sequestered life of the peasant was considered as the preservative
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of his morals. Vice and immorality were looked upon as the attendants upon great and populous cities, while the happier rustics were thought to breathe a purer and less infected air : but it is not so now ; whether, indeed, this is occasioned by the more frequent intercourse with the metropolis than formerly, or by habits contracted by those that have served in the militia, or by the great increase every where of publick ale-houses, may be difficult to determine. Doubtless many causes have contributed to this general profligacy ; but no one, I am persuaded, more forcibly, than the remarkable neglect of religious worship on

the sabbath. Hence it comes to pass, that the lower class of our people are, in general, as ignorant of the common principles of their duty, as the unenlightened heathen; and act under no other restraint than a fear of punishment from the laws of the land, which yet they always flatter themselves with the hopes of escaping. Will men of this disposition, think ye, make any scruple in throwing themselves for relief upon a parish; and, if their wants are not satisfied, will they hesitate to take that by open violence, which their wretched aversion to labour will not suffer them to acquire by honest industry? Is it matter of astonishment, under
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this view of things, either that a constant increase is made in our levies for the poor, or that an open invasion of our properties, should become the subject of so general a complaint? I am not insensible, indeed, that other causes contribute to the frequency of robberies in and about our great metropolis, amongst which, doubtless, that bewitching fondness for gaming, that seems to have pervaded all orders and ranks of men, has the largest share; but I am confining my observations to our country villages, and will go on to say, that without very great exertions on the part of those who have it in their power to apply some remedy, we must

must feel the effects of our wretched situation in a total ruin. It is greatly to be lamented, that many well-disposed persons are contented with bewailing in secret the misery that is coming upon us, without thinking it incumbent upon them to attempt a reformation, as concluding things to be past recovery. Something indeed they say might be hoped for, if our present system of laws for the regulation of the poor were totally abrogated, and a new one adopted in their room. But do these men well consider, how dangerous all experiments are, especially in plans of so extensive a nature, as these now proposed? However, without dwelling upon this

this subject, I will only ask, what can the best enacted laws in the world do for us, if they are not properly executed? Ought we not first to be convinced, by a sufficient trial, that the present are defective, before we venture upon an alteration? And has it been made to appear that this is the case? No; I do not know that this has been attempted. Let us, therefore, without indulging any longer in fruitless complaints, and casting the blame where it certainly ought not to lay, endeavour each of us to exert ourselves to the utmost of our power in our several capacities, under the direction of our present laws, and, I am confident,

fidest, things would soon wear a very different aspect.

LET us begin with aiming at correcting the morals of our people, from whence originate the evils we complain of. Now this, I would hope, in country retirements, is as yet far from being impracticable. Certainly, if the man of property in the parish will cordially unite with the minister and a few of the principal inhabitants, there will be no great difficulty in compelling those that are dependents upon them, duly to attend the publick worship of God on the sabbath; and, when they are assembled there, doubtless no pains will be spared,
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by the preacher, to convince them of the infinite importance of a religious life, and that by arguments best suited to their capacities. This foundation being laid, if the monthly meetings, enjoined by the law, are regularly attended, and each man brings with him a sincere desire of contributing all in his power to the publick good, how easily might every growing evil in the parish be corrected in the bud ! those families that were degenerating into idleness might be reformed, before they were fixed in vicious habits ; and those that were industrious, encouraged to proceed with vigour ; and each

one be applied to in a way most likely to produce the desired effect.

But I mean no more than to hint at these things, I am sure your Lordship will agree with me, in thinking, that something ought to be done, and that speedily, to prevent, if possible, our impending ruin.

I have the honour to be, &c.



